PS1 for 6/1/89 # The Liberals Are Slow Learners

The fact that some columnists are defending Speaker Jim Wright for giving John Mack a “second chance,” and even complaining about “vigilantes who hounded John Mack out of his job in Congress,” shows that the liberals still haven’t learned the 1988 lesson of Willie Horton. It’s a good thing that John Mack isn’t a black, or the liberals would also be deluding themselves with an assertion that criticism of John Mack is covert Republican racism.

Those master political satirists, Gilbert and Sullivan, summed up the commonsense approach to crime and punishment in one of their rhyming ditties: “Let the Punishment Fit the Crime.” Most people understand that principle, but the liberals seem to be exceedingly dense.

Liberals abhor punishment, decry imprisonment, claim that crimes are caused by “society” and “poverty,” and, professing faith in rehabilitation, try to get all criminals out of prison as soon as possible. “Don’t you believe in giving a guy another chance?” they chant.

To which the average American would reply, “only as much chance as the criminal gave his victim.” We believe in personal responsibility; crimes are individual and criminals should be punished appropriately before they are released back among the innocent to endanger other victims.

Just as the Willie Horton issue was not Willie Horton’s crime but rather Governor Michael Dukakis’s letting that murderer out on unsupervised furloughs, so that John Mack issue is not Mack’s crime but rather Jim Wright’s intervention. Wright spring Mack from jail after the unacceptably short time of only 27 months (he had been sentenced to 15 years) and then let him rise to an $87,500 job as Wright’s right-hand man and arguably the most powerful staff member on Capitol Hill. Responsibility for the crime is John Mack’s, but responsibility for the scandal is Jim Wright’s.

In response to the statement by Pamela Small, the victim of Mack’s hammer and knife, that he has never made any restitution to her for her terrible injuries and years of plastic surgery, Democratic Whip Tony Coelho said that Mack paid his debt to society by serving his time in prison. But he didn’t pay his debt; 27 months in the county jail is not punishment that fits the crime of hammering and knifing Pamela Small in a most violent way until, according to his own admission, he believed she was dead.

But the thing about the Mack incident which I found the most reprehensible was Mack’s statement to a psychiatrist a year after the crime that Mack still felt he had “reacted in a way in which any man would perhaps react under similar circumstances” of pressure.

The curious attitude that an extraordinarily vicious crime is ordinary human behavior, and therefore does not deserve extraordinarily severe punishment, is the mark of a typical liberal. Mack’s comment explains why Jim Wright didn’t think it was anything out of the ordinary to use his political position to spring Mack from jail and have him as his closest confidant at an exorbitant taxpayer-financed salary.

The “circumstances” of pressure, as described by Mack, were working 72 hours a week and a failing marriage. I can’t work up any sympathy for Mack. Just think of how many millions of people in this country work 72-hour work weeks and have failing marriages, but don’t bludgeon a woman almost to death.

There has never been any other explanation for why Mack attacked Pamela Small, a woman he had never seen before, when she came into a retail store where he was a salesclerk. There was no evidence of drug use or sexual assault. Mack testified in court that he “just blew my cool.”

Mack described his bizarre criminal attack on Pamela Small as a “tragic mistake” when he was only 19. “Mistake” is not the word to describe savagely beating a woman, leaving her for dead, and then going to see a movie.

Mack now plays such an important role in House business that, according to the **Washington Post**, he “decides which legislation to put on the agenda and which to keep off, handling major responsibilities under considerable pressure.” Shouldn’t Jim Wright have warned the women staffers about John Mack’s prior behavior under “circumstances of pressure” and what could happen if he “blew his cool”?

When the story of Mack the Knife hit the Washington press, Rep. Tony Coelho said that, in the unlikely event that Jim Wright were to let John Mack go, “Members [of Congress] would be lined up to hire him.” Well, Tony, when are you going to hire John Mack? Do give us the names of the liberal Congressmen who are lining up to hire him.